

A photograph of a classroom scene. A female teacher with long brown hair, wearing a black blazer over a white shirt and blue jeans, stands in the center, gesturing with both hands as if speaking. She is facing a group of students whose backs are to the camera. The students are seated in red chairs. The background features a whiteboard with handwritten notes including 'CA', 'H.S. Graduation', 'A-G', and '4-y'. Above the whiteboard is a banner with the word 'WRITE' in large, colorful letters. Above that are several college pennants, including 'UC RIVERSIDE', 'UCLA BRUINS', and 'HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY'. A row of motivational phrases is visible above the whiteboard: 'You are a leader.', 'You are a friend.', 'You are brave.', 'You can change the world.', and 'You are...'.

College Acceleration *in Action*

Five School Perspectives

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About ExcelinEd

Launched by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush in 2008, ExcelinEd supports state leaders in transforming education to unlock opportunity and lifelong success for each and every child. From policy development to implementation, ExcelinEd brings deep expertise and experience to customize education solutions for each state's unique needs. Focused on educational opportunity, innovation and quality, ExcelinEd's agenda is increasing student learning, advancing equity and readying graduates for college and career in states across the nation.

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Cover photo by Allison Shelley for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action.

Introduction

College acceleration opportunities improve students' chances of graduating high school, enrolling in college and earning postsecondary credentials. These opportunities are yielding encouraging benefits for students, yet there remain troubling gaps in quality, value, equity and accessibility.

Our first College Acceleration Playbook identifies a series of non-negotiables that states, colleges, universities and schools can use to strengthen their college acceleration programs to benefit all students—especially those who have been traditionally underserved, including low-income students, rural students and students of color. *College Acceleration in Action: Five School Perspectives* examines how real schools are putting these non-negotiables into practice.

Part 1: The Non-Negotiables

This quick review of the nine non-negotiables for college acceleration opportunities identifies how states can address challenges and improve outcomes for all students. The non-negotiables fall into three buckets:

- Quality and Value
- Equity and Access
- Educators and Advisors

Part 2: School Leader Interviews

This section offers insights from school leaders operating five different college acceleration programs in five different states. They share:

- How their schools are building and sustaining high-quality college acceleration opportunities through the lens of the non-negotiables.
- What additional strategies these school leaders are using to benefit students.
- How COVID-19 affected their college acceleration opportunities with school closures in March 2020.

Part 3: The Takeaways

This final part explores the two trends which emerged from the school leader interviews:

- Successful school leaders focus on what they can control—especially in the areas of student advisement, student eligibility, integration into college and career pathways, and educator training.
- School leaders need help from state policymakers to grow, promote and sustain college acceleration opportunities for students. This support includes data collection and analysis, funding and college credit acceptance and transfer.



What Are College Acceleration Opportunities?

College acceleration opportunities allow students to earn college credit while in high school. The most common college acceleration models include:

- Advanced Placement (AP)
- Cambridge International AS & A Levels (AICE)
- College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- Dual Credit (Dual or Concurrent Enrollment)
- Early College High Schools
- International Baccalaureate (IB)

Schools best serve students when they provide a wide array of college acceleration opportunities to match individual student interest and college and career pathways.

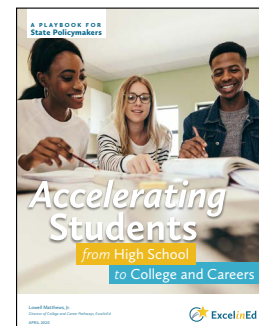
Methodology

To evaluate the non-negotiables for high-quality college acceleration opportunities and how schools address these in practice, ExcelinEd interviewed school leaders from a variety of college acceleration opportunities. Some of the schools were identified by providers and others were selected based on recommendations in states. Due to COVID-19, the interviews were conducted virtually and were restricted to one hour, as these school leaders were heavily engaged in reopening their schools. The school narratives are largely the school leaders' own words, edited for length and clarity.



Playbook 1 Review




Before diving into this playbook, we recommend reviewing our first College Acceleration Playbook, *Accelerating Students from High School to College and Careers*. It examines *why* college acceleration opportunities matter for students and *how* states and schools can evaluate their current offerings through the lens of the nine non-negotiables for high-quality college acceleration opportunities.



The Non-Negotiables

for High-Quality College Acceleration Opportunities

Before we hear from the school leaders, let's quickly review the nine non-negotiables we have identified for high-quality college acceleration opportunities. These non-negotiables are separated into three buckets:

-  Quality and Value
-  Equity and Access
-  Educators and Advisors

Quality and Value

The quality and value bucket comprises four elements designed to strengthen college acceleration opportunities.

1. **Data Collection and Analysis:** *States collect, analyze and publicly report student outcome data on college acceleration opportunities and use the data to strengthen access, quality and student success.*

This will require two equally important elements: a robust longitudinal data system to collect the information and information sharing with schools. This may be one of the most important quality indicators and, based on the interviews we conducted, is the least likely to be done by states.

2. **Input Reviews:** *Postsecondary institutions, K-12 and college acceleration providers regularly review the standards, instructional materials, educator qualifications, exams, student outcome data and vertical linkages of offerings to ensure quality.*

This will require postsecondary institutions, K-12 and college acceleration providers to work collaboratively to review and update course offerings.

3. **Consistent Guidelines:** *States adopt consistent credit acceptance and transfer guidelines across K-12 and postsecondary institutions to ensure quality opportunities that offer students valuable credit.*

This will help students obtain college credit for college-level work, potentially reduce the time and cost to earn a postsecondary credential and inform families of the value of each college acceleration opportunity. States are slowly improving in this area by recognizing program exam scores for college credit throughout colleges and universities, but too many students are potentially walking away with stranded credits.

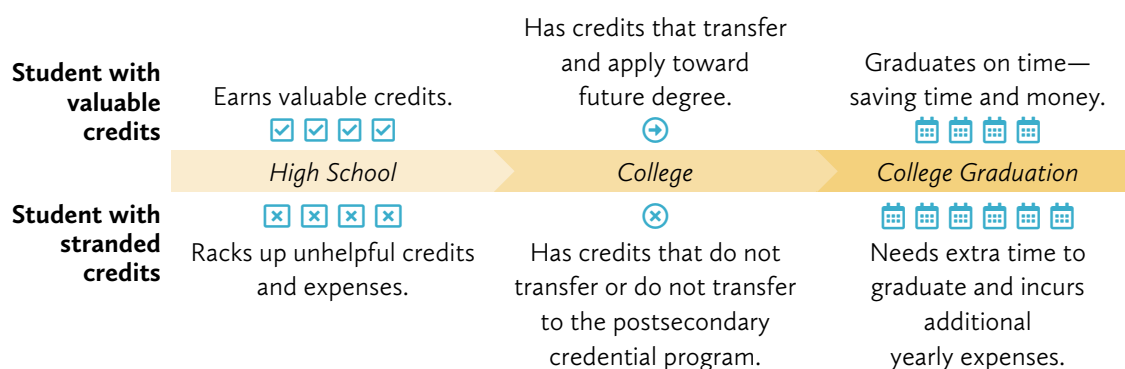
4. Defined and Articulated Pathways: States ensure opportunities are part of a clearly defined and articulated pathway to a postsecondary credential.

The days in which schools separate “college-prep” and Career and Technical Education (CTE) need to end. The skills students learn in college acceleration courses and CTE courses are all needed in the future workforce. While college remains the goal, it will look differently for each student. College is no longer just a four-year degree; it also encompasses valuable sub-baccalaureate credentials, like associate degrees, as well as postsecondary certificates.

What Is a Stranded Credit?

When students earn college credit, they assume it will apply toward a future college degree or credential—but that isn’t always the case. Stranded credit occurs when a student earns college credit, but that credit isn’t accepted towards the student’s credential program. The student loses the time enrolled in the course as well as any tuition or fees expended in a course. This is particularly vexing considering that—with better information—students likely could have used that same time and money to work toward their future degree or credential. Consider the following hypothetical example:

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF STRANDED CREDITS



And stranded credits affect more than just students. States have an interest in students completing their credential on a timely basis. Each additional credit hour that doesn’t translate into viable credit means additional costs to the state for program costs and state subsidies, as well as reduced access to postsecondary admissions for additional students because the student with stranded credits may be taking longer to complete their credential.

Equity and Access

The Equity and Access non-negotiables help address situations where traditionally underserved students may not have access to high-quality college acceleration opportunities. With school districts and states navigating through the financial storm wrought by COVID-19, equity and access will likely come under the most pressure as programs may require significant cuts. States and school districts will need to hold the line here and prevent generalized cuts that hurt underserved students most.

5. Plurality of Student Options: *School districts offer a plurality of opportunities in all high schools to ensure students can select opportunities that align with their chosen career pathways.*

Students need to be in the driver's seat when it comes to selecting the college acceleration opportunities that best meet their needs and match their goals. When students can take multiple acceleration courses over one type of acceleration, they are more likely to graduate high school, go on to college and complete college degrees.

6. Student Cost: *States ensure opportunities are available for little or no cost to the student.*

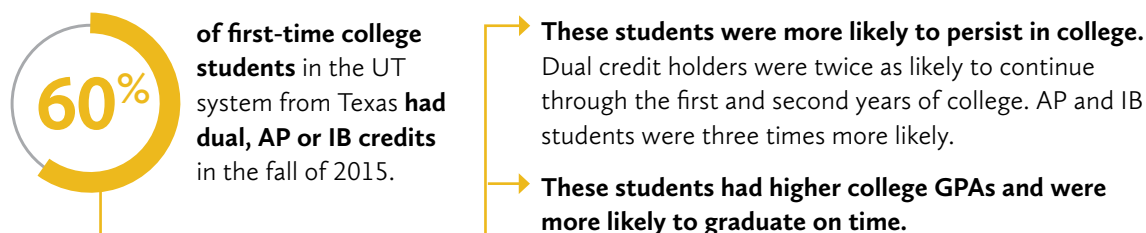
This is especially important to consider for low-income students, considering that the costs in college acceleration—tuition and fees, exam fees, lab fees, instructional materials, registration fees, etc.—could deter them from pursuing these opportunities. States and schools must also consider the barrier that costs pose to students as they respond to the fiscal crisis of COVID-19.

7. Multiple Measures for Student Eligibility: *Postsecondary institutions and schools use multiple measures of student eligibility to allow students to enroll in opportunities, especially low-income and traditionally underrepresented students.*

A state that uses a single metric, such as a standardized assessment score, will inadvertently deny capable students the opportunity to attempt college-rigor in high school. States and postsecondary institutions should look beyond a standardized assessment score to include GPA, grades in subject-related courses, student portfolios of work and teacher recommendations to help identify students who are eligible for college acceleration and likely to succeed. Our interviews with school leaders reinforce the importance of using multiple eligibility metrics to identify students who are capable of college-level work.

How Can College Acceleration Opportunities Benefit Students?

A University of Texas (UT) system study found that:



Source: David R. Troutman, Ph.D., et al., *Dual Credit Study, Dual Credit and Success in College*, University of Texas System, 2018

Educators and Advisors

Educators and Advisors non-negotiables consider the school's capacity to deliver high-quality college acceleration and appropriately assist students as they navigate college acceleration opportunities.

8. **Educator Training:** *States and school districts ensure that educators in all schools receive appropriate training to teach college acceleration opportunities, especially in rural, low-income and low-performing schools.*

High-quality teachers can help students recognize their ability to succeed at college-level work. States and schools need to work in partnership with colleges, universities and college acceleration providers to develop their educator pools to deliver high-quality college acceleration opportunities to all students.

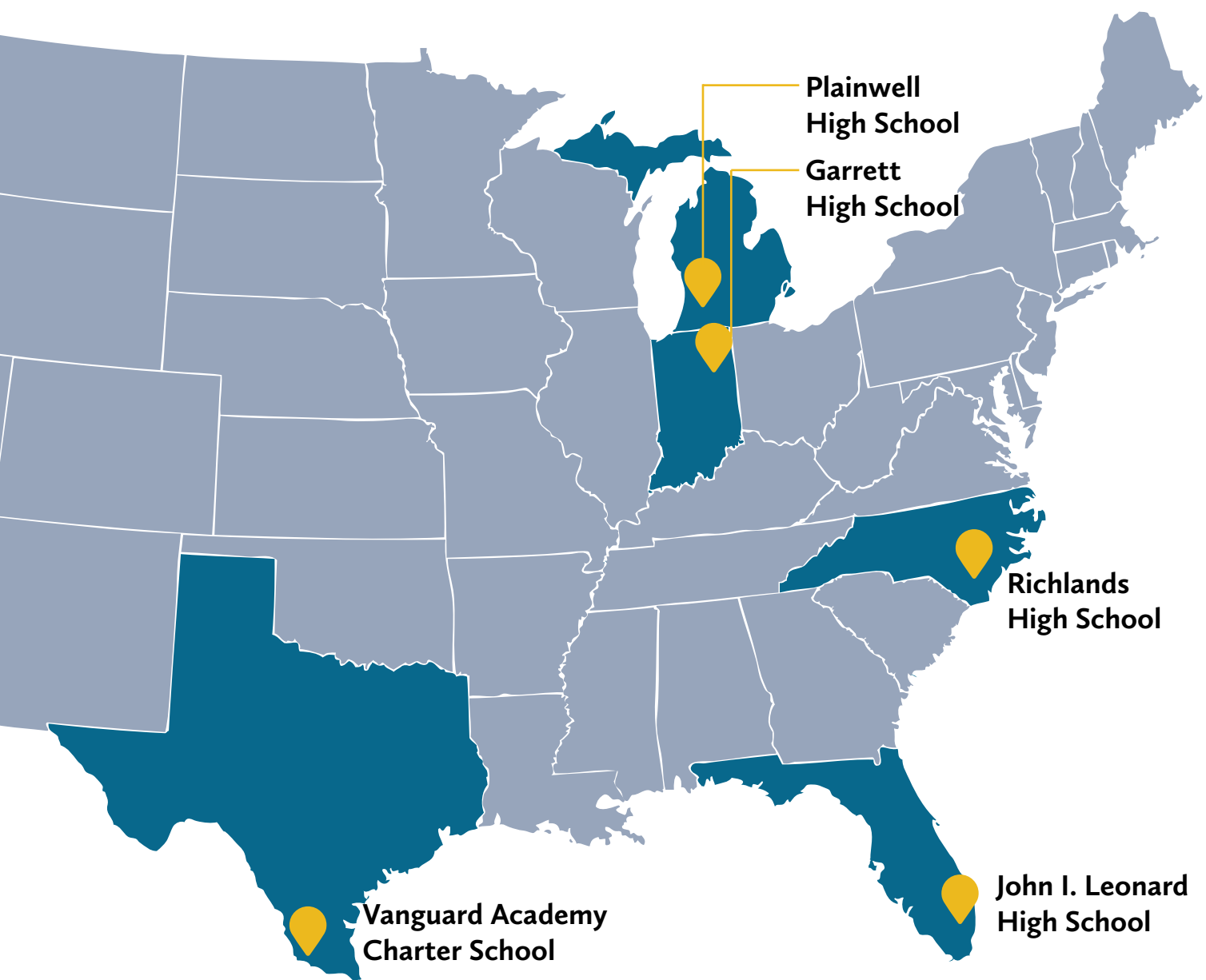
9. **Student Advisement:** *Schools notify students in all schools of available opportunities and use state indicators to identify low-income and traditionally underrepresented students with the potential to succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Schools notify students and their parents of the credit transferability for each college acceleration option before students enroll.*

With the right information and the help of an advisor, students and families can make informed, strategic choices about their college and career pathway and the advanced coursework they will need to navigate that pathway.



School Leader Interviews

Five School Perspectives from Across the Nation



Richlands High School

“Gentle pressure relentlessly.”



Asst. Principal
Frances Turner
Principal
Brad Staley

Despite its rural surroundings, Richlands is quickly becoming a more suburban community as the nearby city of Jacksonville grows. Additionally, U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune is in Jacksonville; therefore, the school serves a large military community. Coupled with the rapid growth and the transient nature of military service, Richlands High School (RHS) faces another challenge—4 in 10 students are economically disadvantaged.



SCHOOL DISTRICT
Onslow County



SCHOOL LOCALE
Rural



STUDENT POPULATION
900



PROGRAM OFFERINGS
AP and Dual Credit

College Acceleration at Richlands High School

While RHS offers dual credit through Coastal Carolina Community College, Advanced Placement (AP) is another popular college acceleration option available to students. In the past four years, RHS has added five new AP courses for a total of 10, including AP Capstone and AP Computer Science Principles. Students currently take AP Computer Science A through the North Carolina Virtual School. However, RHS plans to add AP Computer Science A soon.

RHS has focused on three non-negotiables to drive AP success:

Multiple Measures for Student Eligibility

Educator Training

Student Advisement

Multiple Measures for Student Eligibility

Postsecondary institutions and schools use multiple measures of student eligibility to allow students to enroll in opportunities, especially low-income and traditionally underrepresented students.

RHS ambitiously identifies students capable of AP courses. The school doesn't rely on a single indicator but instead uses a number of tools to indicate AP potential:

- **National Standardized Assessment Data:** PSAT and Pre-ACT assessment data.
- **State Standardized Assessment Data:** 7th- and 8th-grade assessment data from the North Carolina Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS).
- **School Grades:** Algebra and Math 1 (middle school) grades.
- **Middle School Outreach:** Principal Staley works with middle school guidance counselors and administration to help identify AP capable students who may not have been captured in the assessment and grading data.

Educator Training

States and school districts ensure that educators in all schools receive appropriate training to teach college acceleration opportunities.

RHS has aggressively expanded its capacity to teach AP by prioritizing the program through its school budget and external support. Principal Staley has used the following strategies to develop a school where teachers are equipped and excited to teach AP classes:

- **Recognizing and Rewarding Success:** Thanks to support from the North Carolina General Assembly, an AP teacher may earn \$50 per student (up to \$3,500 per year) for each student who earns a 3 or higher on an AP exam. Principal Staley believes that the AP teacher bonus is a significant driver in teachers wanting to teach AP and encouraging more students to attempt AP.
- **Partnering with the College Board for Teacher Training:** The school benefits from the North Carolina General Assembly's partnership with the College Board—the North Carolina AP Partnership (NCAPP)—to

Principal Staley believes that the AP teacher bonus is a significant driver in teachers wanting to teach AP and encouraging more students to attempt AP.

train AP teachers through online professional development, AP workshops as well as AP Summer Institutes.

- **Partnering with NMSI for AP Support:** RHS also has a partnership with the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI), which provides AP support through supplies and instructional materials. Through a grant from NSMI, AP teachers can earn an additional bonus of \$100 per student for each student who earns a 3 or higher on an AP exam. Additionally, students earn \$100 per qualifying score on an AP exam (3 or higher).
- **Training Teachers with District Support:** The local district, Onslow Public Schools, also helps RHS by using additional funds at the district level to train AP teachers (usually three to four teachers) even if they aren't teaching an AP course right now.
- **Supporting and Developing Teachers:** RHS's support for AP teachers extends beyond the budget. For example, the school ensures AP teachers meet each week and share instructional best practices. This practice connects teachers—new and experienced—across classrooms to share and improve their craft.



The Impact of State Policy

Principal Staley acknowledges that Richlands HS's success extends beyond his school's walls. He credits the following state policy elements with supporting his school's work to help more students attempt and succeed in AP courses:

- **Teacher Bonus from the North Carolina General Assembly:** A \$50 **teacher bonus** per student up to \$3,500 for each teacher's student who scores a 3 or higher on an AP exam.
- **North Carolina AP Partnership:** A **partnership between North Carolina and the College Board**, funded by the North Carolina General Assembly, to **help train** AP teachers, especially those in schools serving students who are traditionally underrepresented in college acceleration courses.
- **Fee/Exam Waiver:** **Funding from the state** to pay for all AP, IB and Cambridge AICE exams for public school or charter school students who are enrolled in the corresponding AP/IB/AICE courses.
- **Consistent Guidelines for AP Credit Awarding:** The University of North Carolina system recently changed its policy to **allow the award of AP credit for a 3 or higher** score on an AP exam.

Student Advisement

Schools notify students in all schools of available opportunities and use state indicators to identify low-income and traditionally underrepresented students with the potential to succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Schools notify students and their parents of the credit transferability for each college acceleration option before students enroll.

RHS does an excellent job of notifying students of available college acceleration opportunities, especially AP. This notification process occurs throughout the year so students and parents don't hear about these opportunities for the first time at the registration desk. In particular, RHS does the following:

- School leadership identifies students with AP experience to share their stories with their peers. This helps students who are unsure about taking AP understand what to expect.
- Teachers invite students into their AP labs to see the "cool stuff" their students do, such as in the AP Environmental Science course.

- Principal Staley regularly meets with school advisors and counselors to emphasize AP expectations.
- The school holds AP recruitment nights for counselors, parents, teachers and students to connect.
- Principal Staley meets with new families at registration to discuss the school's AP offerings with them.

RHS also uses gatekeeper AP courses to draw student interest. Most AP exams are taken in the 11th and 12th grade, however, some exams—like AP Computer Science Principals—can be taken in the 9th or 10th grade. These courses demonstrate to students they can succeed in AP courses and encourage enrollment in future AP courses.

💡 Additional Strategy to Improve College Acceleration Opportunities: School Culture

While our nine non-negotiables provide an important framework for quality in college acceleration opportunities, our interview with Principal Staley and Asst. Principal Turner revealed an additional strategy: school culture.

These seasoned educators repeatedly emphasized the need to “change the conversation” on AP potential and success with parents and students. Their culture is epitomized by the refrain, “gentle pressure relentlessly.” Principal Staley and Asst. Principal Turner are constantly enforcing the idea that students can succeed in college-level courses. This notion permeates teacher professional development, school advisor conversations, parent and student interactions as well as the school day. (The master schedule, for example, is examined to ensure block scheduling allows pairing of AP courses.) RHS, quite simply, doesn't take no for an answer on AP.

Looking Forward

Principal Staley has identified two possibilities to support his school—and others in the state—as they advance quality college acceleration options for students:

1. **School Bonuses:** Florida's incentive model offers a teacher bonus *and* a school bonus for each student who earns a qualifying score (3 or higher) on an AP exam. A similar policy in North Carolina could help RHS further extend its AP offerings.
2. **Data Collection and Analysis:** Disaggregated post-high-school data on Richland's AP students would empower the school to share meaningful and relevant information with parents and students about the value of AP coursework. This data, along with anecdotal student stories, could make a compelling case for more students to attempt rigorous coursework like AP.



COVID-19 Impact

The 2019-20 school year was unlike any other because of COVID-19. On March 13, 2020, RHS abruptly closed the school and shifted to a completely different instructional delivery model. Even with the College Board's responsive shift to online exams based on AP course ending on March 13, there were a higher number of student opt-outs in taking the AP exam versus taking the AP course due to COVID-19. RHS students were concerned that the exam would be reliable (i.e., students would lose their work) and that there would be connectivity issues. To help address connectivity concerns, RHS offered Wi-Fi in the school parking lot for AP exam taking. The biggest challenge going forward continues to be AP strategies for remote instruction, which the school is actively developing.

RAPID RESPONSE

The College Board has created *AP instructional resources*—including daily videos—to help schools like RHS meet the needs of teachers, whether they are teaching in-person, hybrid or online courses.

Principal Staley and Asst. Principal Turner are constantly enforcing the idea that students can succeed in college-level courses. This notion permeates teacher professional development, school advisor conversations, parent and student interactions, and the school day.

John I. Leonard High School

"I win some. I lose some. I win more."



Principal
Melissa Patterson

John I. Leonard High School (JILHS) is the largest high school in the Palm Beach County school district. The school's student population is roughly 70% Hispanic, 18% Black and 10% White. Most (85%) students are free- and reduced-price lunch eligible, and approximately half of the students were English language learners at some point in their school matriculation.



Greenacres,
FL



SCHOOL DISTRICT
Palm Beach County



SCHOOL LOCALE
Urban



STUDENT POPULATION
3,600



PROGRAM OFFERINGS
**AP, Cambridge AICE
and Dual Credit**

College Acceleration at John I. Leonard High School

JILHS offers several college acceleration opportunities: AP to around 300 students, dual credit to 50-100 students and Cambridge International AS & A Levels (AICE) to over 1,400 students.

The school offers both the AP Capstone and Cambridge AICE Diploma. Nearly half of the student population takes Cambridge courses. The Cambridge program offers both CTE focused and other traditional academic courses. The program's popularity with students is a result of Principal Patterson's relentless drive to encourage students to take college-level courses. Cambridge is also popular with teachers due to its flexibility, as teachers can adapt the curriculum frameworks to make the classes exciting and relevant for their own students.

JILHS has focused on three non-negotiables to drive Cambridge success:

 **Defined and Articulated Pathways**

 **Multiple Measures for Student Eligibility**

 **Student Advisement**

Defined and Articulated Pathways

States ensure opportunities are part of a clearly defined and articulated pathway to a postsecondary credential.

Unlike most high schools, John I. Leonard seamlessly integrates its college acceleration opportunities—like AP, Cambridge and dual credit—through its career academies and CTE pathways. For example, the Cambridge Travel and Tourism course can be taken as early as the 9th grade and is extremely popular with students. John I. Leonard maps the Cambridge course into its CTE Travel and Tourism pathway. Students will then know the course sequences for the pathway and how college acceleration courses fit into the CTE pathway. The marriage of college acceleration and career pathways continues throughout the school.

On the next page, you will find an example of the school's course sequence for the Computer Technology Academy CTE pathway. College Acceleration courses populate the course sequence. Through this approach, JILHS emphasizes college acceleration opportunities in each defined CTE pathway while simultaneously allowing students to earn college credit and complete a pathway.

Unlike most high schools, John I. Leonard seamlessly integrates its college acceleration opportunities—like AP, Cambridge and dual credit—through its career academies and CTE pathways.

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY: COURSE SEQUENCE

John I. Leonard High School

COURSES	9TH GRADE	10TH GRADE	11TH GRADE	12TH GRADE
English	AICE General Papers, English 1	AICE English Lang AS, English 2	AICE English Lang A, English 3	Dual Enrollment: ENC 1101 <i>or</i> ENC 1102, AP English Literature, English 4
Math	Algebra 1, Geometry, Pre-AICE Math	Geometry, Algebra II, AICE Math	Algebra II, Pre-Calculus, Calculus Honors, AP Calculus, AP Statistics	Pre-Calculus, Calculus Honors, AP Calculus, AP Statistics, Dual Enrollment Math
Science	Earth Space Science, Biology H	Biology, Chemistry	Chemistry, AICE Marine, AICE Environmental Management, AP Biology, Anatomy & Physiology Honors, Physics Honors, AP Physics, Dual Enrollment A&P	AICE Marine, AICE Environmental Science, AP Biology, Anatomy & Physiology H, Physics Honors, AP Physics, Dual Enrollment A&P
Social Studies	Elective: AP Human Geography	World History, AICE European History	U.S. History, AICE U.S. History	American Government/ Economics, AP Government/ Economics
Academy Class	Foundations of Programming <i>and</i> Foundations of Web Design	AICE Comp Sci 1 AS, AICE Comp Sci 2 A, Digital Design I, Web Design, Tech Support, Game & Simulation Design, Computer & Network Security Fund	AICE Computing AS/A, Digital Design II H, Support Client II H, Digital Art II, Game & Simulation Programming, Cybersecurity Essentials	Dual Enrollment Micro Computer Applications/Intro to Internet, Web Scripting Fund., Tech Support Client IIIH, Digital Art III H, Multi-User Game/ Sim Programming H, Operational Cyber Security
Elective	Foreign Language	Foreign Language	Elective	Elective
Elective	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional

Multiple Measures for Student Eligibility

Postsecondary institutions and schools use multiple measures of student eligibility to allow students to enroll in opportunities, especially low-income and traditionally underrepresented students.

JLLHS's students face certain challenges. As such, Principal Patterson cannot solely rely on the state, standardized assessment or the PSAT to identify students who have the potential to succeed at college acceleration courses. Through those methods, only 15% of students would qualify. Instead, Principal Patterson uses several data points to identify students capable of taking college acceleration courses, including overall GPA, English GPA and AP Human Geography (in Spanish).

There are no eligibility restrictions on Cambridge course enrollment. However, the school must overcome significant challenges to increase Cambridge enrollment: students often don't understand the course or its value, students don't believe they can succeed in college-level courses and many parents have lost the idea of the value of a college education. As a result, Principal Patterson and her team spend a significant amount of time in student outreach.

Student Advisement

Schools notify students in all schools of available opportunities and use state indicators to identify low-income and traditionally underrepresented students with the potential to succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Schools notify students and their parents of the credit transferability for each college acceleration option before students enroll.

JLLHS does an outstanding job of notifying and recruiting students to take college acceleration opportunities, especially Cambridge. This hard work begins before interacting with students and parents. Principal Patterson sets an annual target based on the prior year with growth. For the 2020-21 school year, her target is to have 50% of the student population enrolled in Cambridge courses. She also examines the demographic composition of Cambridge to ensure targets are met for English language learners and students with disabilities. In short, Principal Patterson begins with high expectations for all students.

Once the targets are set, Principal Patterson and her team engage in several outreach activities, including:

- **Sending Information and Resources:** The school sends families informational letters about Cambridge courses as well as forms for college acceleration enrollment.
- **Highlighting College Cost Savings:** The school shares information with parents about how students can earn college credit through college acceleration in high school as well as qualify for Florida's Bright Futures academic scholarship for college students.
- **Advising Students:** Individual counselors advise students in grades 9-11, and the school holds college orientation nights each February with registration for the next year's courses.
- **Showcasing College Acceleration Courses:** During SAT/ACT testing days, the students who are not testing engage in student workshops that showcase college acceleration courses and exciting activities done in these courses.
- **Prioritizing Relationships:** The school focuses on strong teacher/student relationships so all students understand that they matter and can succeed in college acceleration courses.



The Impact of State Policy

Principal Patterson acknowledges that JILHS's success is assisted through several **Florida policies**.

- **Teacher Bonus:** The Florida Legislature has created a \$50 teacher bonus per student, with no cap on the bonus amount, for each student scoring an "E" or higher on a Cambridge exam or 3 or higher on an AP exam.
- **School Bonus:** The Florida Legislature has created a \$691 school bonus per student for each student scoring an "E" or higher on a Cambridge exam for the 2020-21 school year. (The bonus is part of Florida's student funding formula and is equivalent to 0.16 full-time equivalent student membership). Additionally, the school receives \$1,295 in bonus funding per student who earns a Cambridge diploma or AP Capstone Diploma. (The bonus is equivalent to 0.3 full-time equivalent student membership under Florida's student funding formula.)
- **Student Financial Aid:** A student who earns the Cambridge AICE diploma automatically qualifies for the Florida Bright Futures Academic Scholars award regardless of the student's SAT/ACT score. The award pays 100% of the tuition and applicable fees at an eligible Florida college or university. The student must still complete the volunteer service hours and meet other Florida residence requirements.



Additional Strategy to Improve College Acceleration Opportunities: Risk-Taking

Many of the actions listed above may seem familiar to most high schools, but Principal Patterson has an additional strategy to drive college acceleration enrollment and success. She takes a risk by automatically enrolling students in Cambridge courses and other college acceleration opportunities.

After this automatic enrollment, some parents and students inevitably seek a change. But to do so, they must first talk with Principal Patterson and her team, and *this* gives the school another opportunity to sell the value of college acceleration courses and inform parents about their children's capability to succeed. Principal Patterson explains, "I automatically enroll students in more rigorous courses like Cambridge. There is a risk to auto-enrolling students. Parents sometimes push back and ask that their student is removed from the course. I win some. I lose some. I win more."

Looking Forward

Principal Patterson would like access to disaggregated, post-graduate high school data on students who successfully complete a Cambridge course or earn the Cambridge AICE diploma, along with other college acceleration options, to help her better identify best practices or improvements in current offerings. This data could help, alongside the anecdotal stories from students, convince more students to attempt rigorous coursework like Cambridge.

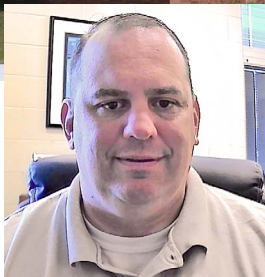


COVID-19 Impact

JILHS closed its doors on March 16, 2020, and shifted to a remote instructional delivery model. With respect to Cambridge, no Cambridge exams were administered in spring/summer 2020. Instead, teachers were responsible for compiling student evidence of success and for ranking the students on the A-E scale by course. Cambridge could request compiled student evidence. Cambridge created an algorithm to compare predicted grades with teacher evidence and student performance in previous courses to judge grading.

Plainwell High School

“Our goal is to up the level of rigor.”



Principal
Jeremy Wright

Plainwell High School (PHS) is located about 12 miles outside Kalamazoo, Michigan. The student population is 92% White, 27% free- or reduced-price eligible and includes students who are unaccompanied minors supported by Bethany Christian Services.



Plainwell, MI



SCHOOL DISTRICT

Plainwell
Community Schools



SCHOOL LOCALE

Rural



STUDENT POPULATION

800



PROGRAM OFFERINGS

AP, CLEP and
Dual Credit

College Acceleration at Plainwell High School

PHS offers AP, College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and dual credit, which it delivers through Kalamazoo Valley Community College. PHS's CLEP program is offered through **Modern States**, which provides CLEP exams to students for free. The school uses CLEP exams as final exams in several courses and allows students to earn college credit while they take the underlying course in high school.

PHS focuses on three non-negotiables to drive CLEP success:

✚ **Plurality of Student Options**

✚ **Student Cost**

👥 **Student Advisement**

✚ **Plurality of Student Options**

School districts offer a plurality of opportunities in all high schools to ensure students can select opportunities that align with their chosen career pathways

Students at PHS can choose from several college acceleration opportunities, including an articulated credit pathway for an EMT program through Kalamazoo Valley Community College. While the school also offers dual credit and AP, it is best known for its recent expansion of CLEP opportunities for students.

In 2018-19, the school initiated CLEP French exam opportunities for French-speaking unaccompanied minors that were placed in the school by Bethany Christian Services. But the school quickly recognized the value of this program extended beyond language credits. Roughly 100 students took a CLEP exam during the first year, with most of the exams being taken through a precalculus class. Now students have the option to take the CLEP exam as the final exam for this course, which is what most students choose to do. Principal Wright's ultimate goal is to have the CLEP exam become the final exam option in several other courses, such as sociology, introduction to computers, marketing, economics and more. In the 2019-20 school year, roughly 90% of the school's non-AP math classes use the CLEP exam as a final exam option.

However, what makes PHS's CLEP opportunity interesting is Principal Wright's decision to offer the CLEP exam opportunity to students who score a 2 on an AP exam. A score of 2 on an AP exam does not confer college credit, yet the school encourages these students to take the CLEP exam *after* the AP exam. Sometimes, these students score high enough on the CLEP exam to earn college credit. Essentially, students are getting two opportunities to earn the college credit.

✚ **Student Cost**

States ensure that opportunities are available for little or no cost to the student.

PHS makes the CLEP exam open to any student. In fact, the school has tested alumni too. And due to the partnership with Modern States, the CLEP exams are free. Meanwhile, Kalamazoo Valley Community College charges a \$20 CLEP exam administration fee.

Student Advisement

Schools notify students in all schools of available opportunities and use state indicators to identify low-income and traditionally underrepresented students with the potential to succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Schools notify students and their parents of the credit transferability for each college acceleration option before students enroll.

Principal Wright and his team pursue CLEP outreach with students and parents through the following activities:

- The school hosts an annual “Paying for College” night to inform parents and students about options to pay for college before students leave high school.
- The school uses social media to promote college credit opportunities through CLEP.
- Counsellors meet with 9th graders every year to build out a four-year high school plan through the Michigan College Access Network.
- Students complete a postsecondary preparation class where they learn about the benefits of CLEP and other college acceleration options.
- College advisors meet with parents and seniors as well as a “near peer” graduate from Western Michigan University. Near peers are recent college grads that may relate better with students. This near peer position is funded by the school and a five-year grant.

While Principal Wright credits his team and their work for increasing CLEP interest, exam-taking and success, he also believes that news is spreading word of mouth and increasing interest in the school's college acceleration opportunities.

Additional Strategy to Improve College Acceleration Opportunities: School Culture

While the nine non-negotiables provide an important framework for quality in college acceleration opportunities, Principal Wright believes the school's culture also plays an essential role. At PHS, students expect to take and succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Principal Wright noted, “our goal is to up the level of rigor.”

Looking Forward

While Principal Wright credits his school's partnerships with Modern States and the College Board for its CLEP success, there's still room for improvement. He has identified three concerns policymakers could address to improve student outcomes for students in Plainwell and across the state.

1. **School Bonuses:** There is no inducement at the state level for schools to offer CLEP, so many schools and students may be missing out on this opportunity.
2. **Data Collection and Analysis:** PHS and other schools have difficulty obtaining post-graduate data on students who take CLEP to help drive program best practices and showcase student success.
3. **Consistent Guidelines:** There are inconsistent guidelines for acceptance of CLEP credit at state universities, and this inconsistency hinders student engagement in CLEP.



COVID-19 Impact

On March 13, 2020, Plainwell closed its doors and shifted to a remote instructional delivery model. PHS's students were fortunate in that the school had wrapped up CLEP for the most part the week before the shutdown.

Garrett High School

"Our goal is the economic freedom of students."



High School Program
Director: Chad Sutton,
Director of Career
Development, GHS



College Program
Director: Kimberly
Waugh, K-14
Engagement &
Transition, Ivy Tech



Garrett High School (GHS) is in a blue-collar community roughly 20 miles outside Fort Wayne, Indiana. Many students come from families who work in the local manufacturing and construction industries. Around 90% of the students are White, 40% are economically disadvantaged and about 18% are students with disabilities.



SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Garrett-Keyser-
Butler Community**



SCHOOL LOCALE

Rural



STUDENT POPULATION

600



PROGRAM OFFERING

Dual Credit

College Acceleration at Garrett High School

GHS operates on the belief that all students are college worthy and that college looks different for each student. The school offers an expansive dual credit program in conjunction with its education partner, Ivy Tech Community College. The high school's largest programs are centered on CTE.

GHS has focused on three non-negotiables to drive dual credit success:

 **Defined and Articulated Pathways**

 **Educator Training**

 **Student Advisement**

Defined and Articulated Pathways

States ensure opportunities are part of a clearly defined and articulated pathway to a postsecondary credential.

GHS offers career pathways in construction, manufacturing, engineering and design as well as business. The school offers dual credit CTE through Ivy Tech, and there are no student eligibility barriers to the construction and manufacturing dual credit CTE courses. Industry-valued certifications are embedded in the Ivy Tech courses, so students can walk away with college credit as well as a valuable credential. From first semester to graduation, GHS has built its career pathways with industry/employer engagement.

On the front end, GHS employs an innovative model to drive student interest in career pathways and dual credit CTE. GHS begins early with design/project learning experiences for local 5th-grade students. One year, for example, the project focused on woodworking projects. All 5th-grade students worked on a table ornament project, which they were able to take home to show their families. The experience continues in middle school with project designs and blueprints. In high school, students have the option to continue the learning experience through dual credit via Ivy Tech. Along the way, students are also exposed to local companies who discuss their skill needs.

Students can see the value of their learning. In the school's construction pathway, the community has donated land and opportunities for students to build out a subdivision of housing. For more than 40 years, students have built about one house per year.

On the back end, students can see the value of their learning. In the school's construction pathway, the community has donated land and opportunities for students to build out a subdivision of housing. For more than 40 years, students have built about one house per year.

Educator Training

States and school districts ensure that educators in all schools receive appropriate training to teach college acceleration opportunities.

It can be challenging for high schools with traditional college dual credit programs to find qualified teachers that meet the requirements of accrediting entities like the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). This is especially true when it comes to teachers with industry-valued skills. Salaries for a welder or machinist, for example, could be double or triple in the private sector compared to teaching those skills in K-12.

Consequently, GHS is working with Ivy Tech and four-year postsecondary partners like Purdue University Fort Wayne and Indiana University Fort Wayne to help its high school teachers earn masters' degrees and meet HLC requirements. (HLC requires a master's degree in the specialty to be taught or a master's degree in another discipline plus 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline to be taught.) While the dual credit credential requirement was stayed until 2022, it remains a significant hurdle for traditional college dual credit courses. Ivy Tech also lends a helpful hand by providing adjunct faculty for much of GHS's CTE dual credit instruction, including construction, welding, heavy highway and engineering.

Student Advisement

Schools notify students in all schools of available opportunities and use state indicators to identify low-income and traditionally underrepresented students with the potential to succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Schools notify students and their parents of the credit transferability for each college acceleration option before students enroll.

GHS's Director of Career Development Chad Sutton and his team aggressively pursue student interest in CTE dual credit. Along with the project/design work beginning in the elementary grades, GHS engages students and parents through a variety of events. One way the school connects with students is through a signing day. Normally held for student athletes pursuing postsecondary sports, GHS's signing day for career pathways showcase students succeeding at dual credit and receiving an offer for a middle-skills or higher-skills job. Parents can see how student success, college credit, work-based experience and industry certifications lead to an exciting job offer.

On the career navigation side, Sutton and his team have worked for the past four years with dual credit college advisors from Ivy Tech. These advisors are funded through grants and the Ivy Tech general fund, and they work to ensure students understand the value of dual credit CTE pathways that are vertically linked with postsecondary programs.



The Impact of State Policy

GHS has been recognized by the state of Indiana with the **Office of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship's State Earn and Learn (SEAL) Certification** for its construction trades program. GHS was one of the first schools to earn the designation in the state. The SEAL certification allows students to earn industry-valued credentials and college credit while participating in paid, on-the-job training.

Students enrolled in the program can graduate high school with: 22 college credits through Ivy Tech; 7 industry-recognized credentials; 1,200+ hours of on-the-job training; and connections to over 40 local businesses/employers for internship, job shadowing, mentoring and employment opportunities.

💡 Additional Strategy to Improve College Acceleration Opportunities: School Culture

Sutton credited GHS's school culture in driving student enrollment and success in CTE dual credit and career pathways. He and his team have been able to change the mindsets of parents, teachers and advisors to believe that all students are college worthy, and that college looks different for each student because it is more than just a four-year degree.

As Sutton stated, the goal of GHS's CTE dual credit and career pathways is "the economic freedom of students." With students earning college credit, attaining industry certifications, gaining work-based experience and completing career pathways, GHS is making that goal a reality.

Looking Forward

The partnership between GHS and Ivy Tech is key to dual credit success. Ivy Tech is using its resources and supports to ensure students experience CTE dual credit success. Sutton and Waugh believe the partnership could be strengthened if the state placed additional resources into these programs when they succeed.

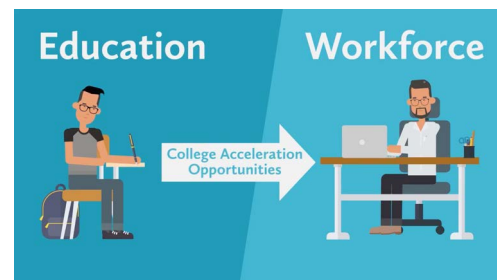


COVID-19 Impact

GHS closed its doors on March 13, 2020, and shifted to a remote instructional delivery model. It was a particularly difficult transition, especially for hands-on learning in the construction and manufacturing pathways. Fortunately, students had completed the contact hours necessary to earn college credit through the CTE dual credit. This also helped the students pass their embedded industry certifications. Students returned in the summer for lab work. Sutton and his team called families individually to bring students in to complete this necessary work.

Model Policies

ExcelinEd offers a suite of model policies, including one for **dual enrollment**, for states to consider as they design high-quality college acceleration opportunities for students. Visit ExcelinEd.org/CollegeAcceleration to learn more.



Vanguard Academy Charter School

“Students provide the want;
we provide the rest.”



Superintendent
Dr. Narciso Garcia

Vanguard Academy is a rapidly growing public charter school system comprising four elementary schools and three secondary schools. From 2017 to 2019, the student body grew from 2,700 to 5,000. The school system serves a large urban area in the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission metropolitan area on the U.S.-Mexico border. The student population is 99% Hispanic, 75% economically disadvantaged and 45% English language learners.



Pharr, TX



SCHOOL DISTRICT

Vanguard Academy



SCHOOL LOCALE

Urban



STUDENT POPULATION

5,000



PROGRAM OFFERINGS

**AP, Dual Credit
and T-STEM Early
College High School**

College Acceleration at Vanguard Academy High School

Vanguard Academy is an early college high school. This means students can simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an associate degree or up to two years' worth of college credits towards a bachelor's degree while they are in high school.

The academy partners with South Texas College for dual credit opportunities and the associate degree. Additionally, the academy offers students the opportunity to complete career pathways in health science, computer science, criminal justice, engineering/robotics and welding. (Students are transported to South Texas College for the welding program.) Vanguard Academy's partnership with South Texas College makes the successful early college high school model possible.

Since Dr. Garcia became superintendent in 2017, the number of students earning associate degrees has grown from 7 students in 2018 to 35 students in 2019 to expectations of 50+ students for 2020-21. Roughly 500 of the school's 700 students are taking college level classes—including 120 students who are taking dual credit and AP.

Vanguard Academy has focused on three non-negotiables to drive early college high school success.

 **Data Collection and Analysis**

 **Educator Training**

 **Student Advisement**

Data Collection and Analysis

States collect, analyze and publicly report student outcome data on college acceleration opportunities and use the data to strengthen access, quality and student success.

Through its partnership with South Texas College, Vanguard Academy uses student outcome data to evaluate dual credit courses and improve advisement for students.

To begin, South Texas College monitors the academic performance of Vanguard Academy's dual credit students to ensure they are performing well in college. South Texas College also shares student performance data on the academy's alumni with Dr. Garcia and his team, so they can understand how equipped their graduates are to succeed as college students. (They are doing well; the average college GPA of Vanguard Academy alumni is a successful 3.0.) All this data on current and former students helps inform the academy's college advisement efforts with parents and students. South Texas College has a vested interest in sharing this data with Vanguard Academy. As Dr. Garcia explains, "It's their students, too!"

Educator Training

States and school districts ensure that educators in all schools receive appropriate training to teach college acceleration opportunities.

Students at Vanguard Academy can take dual credit courses on the South Texas College campus or on the academy's campus. Faculty accreditation requirements for the educators teaching these dual credit/early college programs require a master's degree in the specialty to be taught or a master's degree in another discipline plus 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline to be taught. This requirement can make staffing a challenge.

Before Dr. Garcia began leading the school system, Vanguard Academy had two to four teachers with a master's degree, but these teachers were not being leveraged for dual credit instruction. Now the academy is using tools—both internal and external—to develop their teachers. Through an academy initiative, teachers can earn \$3,000-\$4,000 per semester in stipends to meet the accreditation requirements. Additionally, Vanguard Academy offers salary incentives for teaching dual credit, including a \$6,000 sign-on bonus and \$1,500 per semester to teach dual credit in the early college model. Through these initiatives, Dr. Garcia was able to recruit qualifying instructors for art, criminal justice and Spanish in the first year and English, math, history, computer science and CTE, especially in the area of health sciences, in the third year.

Student Advisement

Schools notify students in all schools of available opportunities and use state indicators to identify low-income and traditionally underrepresented students with the potential to succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Schools notify students and their parents of the credit transferability for each college acceleration option before students enroll.

Vanguard Academy does an excellent job of notifying and supporting students in postsecondary success.

The community presents both challenges and opportunities for the academy. There is no resistance to college—rather, the community recognizes the importance of college. The academy informs and equips its families by:

- Conducting monthly, semester and annual meetings with students and parents on college acceleration.
- Discussing early college opportunities with 10th-grade students; discussing opportunities for an associate degree with 11th and 12th graders.
- Advising students and parents about college.

Vanguard Academy also continues to support students *after* they graduate. Dr. Garcia and his team take the following strategic steps:

- Calling and meeting with students and parents of graduates, including through Zoom meetings, twice a month.
- Creating small learning communities of college students to share their experiences with students who are in their first year on a college campus.
- Reconnecting students who have discontinued college or dropped out with South Texas College. (South Texas College provides stipends of around \$5,000 to help these students continue and finish their credential.)

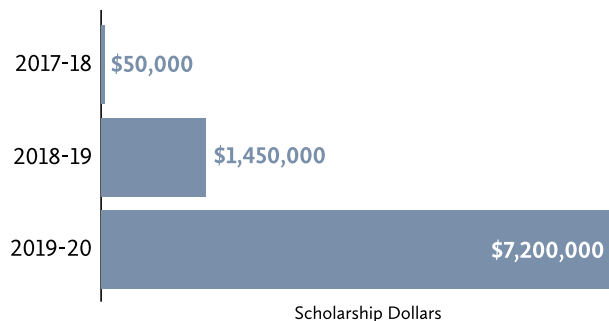
💡 Additional Strategy to Improve College Acceleration Opportunities: Leadership

While the nine non-negotiables provide an important framework for quality in college acceleration opportunities, the interview with Dr. Garcia revealed the power of leadership. Under Dr. Garcia, Vanguard Academy has transformed into a model for how successful early college high schools can put students on a better path toward postsecondary success.

Consider some of the other strategic changes Dr. Garcia has made to help prepare students for lifelong success since he joined Vanguard Academy in 2017:

- **Dual Language:** Dr. Garcia immediately instituted a dual language PreK-3 program to help address challenges facing the school system's large English language learner population.
- **Upgraded Technology:** Vanguard Academy upgraded its devices in a short period of time. In 2017, Dr. Garcia replaced Vanguard Academy's outdated desktop computers with 1,800 Chromebooks for students and laptops for teachers. He purchased an additional 1,500 Chromebooks in 2018-19, followed by the purchase of 600 Chromebooks and 900 Kindle Fires in 2019-20. Finally, the school purchased additional Chromebooks in March 2020 to help with remote instruction resulting from COVID-19.
- **Funding College:** Before Dr. Garcia began leading the academy, students had to pay for dual credit and schools had to individually raise funds to support these courses. Beginning in 2017-18, dual credit courses were free for students. The school also hired a college transition specialist who found that the school wasn't using SAT/ACT fee waivers. Additionally, Dr. Garcia is setting high expectations for his high school students to earn college scholarships, and these expectations have already paid off tremendously.

College Scholarships Earned by Vanguard Academy Students



- **Postsecondary Support:** Finally, Dr. Garcia addressed supports to help Vanguard Academy alumni navigate college selection and advisement.

Vanguard Academy's success is, by large part, a product of Dr. Garcia's strong, thoughtful leadership. He and his team have addressed many of the barriers students previously encountered on the path toward postsecondary enrollment and success. Now, he says, all Vanguard Academy students need to do is "provide the want" and his team will "provide the rest."



The Impact of State Policy

Texas provides an **Early College High School designation** for schools that educate historically underserved students, provide dual credit at cost to students, increase college readiness, offer accelerated courses and provide academic and social support services to help students succeed. Vanguard Academy has earned this designation. The designation is mostly a marketing tool to advertise the value of the academy. However, the designation's value would substantially increase if Texas committed to financially back the designation with additional funding to early college high schools, like it does with Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH).

Texas is upping the ante on outcomes-based funding for students Texas determines are prepared for college, career and the military. Legislation passed in 2019 would reward districts for students enrolling in postsecondary institutions, completing a credential or enlisting in the military. The amount of **funding is tiered**: \$5,000 per student for economically disadvantaged students, \$3,000 per student for non-economically disadvantaged students and \$2,000 per student for students with disabilities who meet the specified college, career and military readiness outcomes.

Looking Forward

Dr. Garcia believes that Vanguard Academy—and other Texas early college high schools—could benefit from state policy that creates a performance-based incentive based on the number of students earning an associate degree or equivalent number of college credit hours. This policy would help grow successful schools that drive postsecondary student success, especially schools that educate traditionally underserved students.



COVID-19 Impact

On March 13, 2020, Vanguard Academy abruptly closed and shifted to a completely different instructional delivery model. Hidalgo County, Texas, where Vanguard Academy is located, had the highest per capita COVID-19 death rate in the state and was fifth in the number of COVID-19 cases early in the pandemic.

Although schools in Texas were told to plan for two weeks of remote instruction, Dr. Garcia suspected that the school closure would be significantly longer, and he instructed teachers to plan for remote instruction for the remainder of the school year. Dr. Garcia called in his teachers and staff to hand out devices. Grades 3-12 received instruction through Google Classroom, and preK-2 were given packets.



The Takeaways

The school leaders featured in this playbook care deeply about their students' futures, and they have strategically developed strong, valuable college acceleration opportunities to set their students up for success. The school leader interviews revealed two distinct trends with respect to the non-negotiables for high-quality college acceleration opportunities.

Trend #1 – Successful School Leaders Focus on What They Can Control

The school leaders we interviewed focused mostly on the areas they can control: student advisement, educator training, multiple measures for student eligibility as well as defined and articulated pathways. Areas in which they have less control—such as state-level student outcome data and consistent guidelines for credit acceptance and transferability—are not reflected as much in the interviews, with the notable exception of the Vanguard Academy where the relationship between South Texas College and the school is integrally important.

This trend makes intuitive sense in that these leaders are pushed and pulled in many directions. They are focused on notifying students of college acceleration opportunities, convincing students that they can succeed in these college-level courses and providing the supports to help these students succeed.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

School leaders can successfully grow college acceleration programs by focusing on several elements under their control, often at little or no cost to the school or school district.

1. Focus on Student Advisement

Notify all students of college acceleration opportunities. Notification goes far beyond sending a letter/email or a school announcement. This means college acceleration recruitment nights, steering students to these opportunities at registration, showcasing what students do in these courses as well as using administrators, teachers and advisors to sell the value of college acceleration opportunities.

Provide college and career advisement to alumni. Advisement traditionally includes college and career pathway advice with college acceleration opportunities. However, school leaders can do more by engaging with students who have already graduated and are in their first year of college to provide pathway advice and support, especially with first-generation college students.

2. Expand the Measures by Which Students Qualify for and Are Identified as Capable of Succeeding in College Acceleration Opportunities

Use multiple measures of student eligibility. School leaders need to expand student eligibility metrics for college acceleration beyond a single metric like standardized test scores. In some cases, the student eligibility requirements may be state mandated. In other cases, the school leader may need to negotiate with colleges and universities to change the student eligibility requirements. Regardless, school leaders can use the metrics for both student eligibility and student identification to encourage students to attempt college acceleration coursework. These metrics could include: overall GPA; related-subject grades; teacher recommendations; enrollment and success in advanced coursework (including honors courses that do not bestow college credit); and demonstration of student work.

3. Integrate College Acceleration and Career Pathways

Align college acceleration opportunities and CTE. The future workforce landscape is changing. Job applicants are expected to bring skills that are learned from both college and career pathways. School leaders can integrate college acceleration courses into career pathways to encourage traditional college-prep students to take CTE courses and, conversely, use career pathways to encourage CTE students to take college-credit bearing courses.

4. Train Educators to Teach College Acceleration Opportunities

Develop educator training for college acceleration coursework. School leaders should leverage the qualifications of the teachers they already have, take advantage of professional development opportunities like summer institutes and negotiate incentives for educators to begin teaching college acceleration courses. They should also investigate the school's relationship with local postsecondary providers to determine an effective means of scaling up the teaching workforce to meet accreditation requirements for college acceleration courses like dual credit. A college or university may have a built-in incentive to help schools train up their teachers, as the students who take these college-level courses may be more likely to enroll in the college or university following high school graduation.

Trend #2 – State Policy Can Expand College Acceleration

While school leaders can focus on several elements to increase the number of students taking and succeeding in college acceleration opportunities, the state plays an important role in expediting student success and recouping its investment through a more educated and skilled workforce.

Through the interviews, school leaders were emphatic that the state policy could help schools give students more opportunities to attempt college-level work in high school and earn college credit. In particular, the school leaders focused on four areas: (1) student outcome data collection and analysis; (2) student cost; (3) school funding for college acceleration opportunities; and (4) consistent guidelines for credit acceptance and transference.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Create State Policy on Student Outcome Data Collection and Analysis

Four of the five school leaders specifically mentioned the importance of postsecondary student outcome data on their college acceleration students and the need to share that data with schools. The data would help school leaders drive programmatic change through the identification and promotion of best practices, as well as help market the success of these college acceleration courses to new students. The state should enact a policy to collect this data and share it with the originating school. In some cases, the data may be collected but not matched with individual students. This is also a policy that can be enacted during the upcoming fiscal environment brought on by COVID-19.

2. Create State Policy on Providing College Acceleration Opportunities at No Cost to Students

The coming state budgetary landscape will be significantly upturned by COVID-19. States will be under pressure to cut deficits and often the cuts will disproportionately fall on funding allocations outside the school budgeting formula. Some states, like Florida, will be able to protect their college acceleration options from disproportionate cuts because college acceleration is embedded in the student funding formula. In many other states, however, funds that enable students to avoid paying for exam fees, registration fees or instructional materials may be line item allocations.

States need to avoid the temptation to disproportionately cut these college acceleration programs because the cuts would exacerbate inequities. Students, especially low-income students, will need the state to protect their ability to climb the economic mobility ladder by earning college credits in high

school, subsequently enrolling in college and universities, and successfully earning a postsecondary credential. College acceleration opportunities drive that success. States need to protect these opportunities for students.

3. Create State Policy on School Incentives

All five school leaders either credited state policy incentives tied to student success in college acceleration coursework or wished their state had enacted a similar policy. Two of the school leaders acknowledged that a state financial incentive tied to student success in college acceleration coursework is a major driver in teacher interest in teaching these courses. A school incentive can similarly turbocharge college acceleration programs. With the advent of COVID-19, new school funding may be unlikely even though these performance investments will increase the number of students taking and succeeding in college-level work. However, states can review [ExcelinEd's AP Incentive Program Model Policy](#) and begin to look at how states like [North Carolina](#), [Florida](#) and [Texas](#) are shaping future financial incentives for student success.

4. Create State Policy with Consistent Guidelines on Credit Acceptance and Transfer

Two of the five school leaders either credited consistent guidelines for the credit acceptance and transfer of college credit earned through college acceleration opportunities or lamented a uniform guideline's absence.

In some states, the governing board for higher education or individual colleges and universities determine college credit acceptance for college acceleration coursework or exam passage. In other states, the state legislature requires colleges and universities to accept certain exam scores or grades for college credit. Regardless, the state should ensure consistent guidelines are followed for credit acceptance and transfer in consultation with colleges and universities. Inconsistency within states often depends on the type of postsecondary institution considering the credit (e.g., a research-based university versus a regional institution or community college). However, states also need to consider potential inconsistencies in how college credit is applied by college acceleration opportunity type. For example, is a qualifying score in AP, Cambridge or IB treated the same as college credit earned through dual credit? Inconsistency and the lack of information about the credit acceptance before students enroll in the college acceleration course may deter students from attempting college-level work. School leaders can use a consistent guideline on college credit to promote college acceleration opportunities to students.

States also need to consider creating guidelines to protect the credits students may have earned in other states. For example, RHS serves many military families who often transfer from one state to another. States can—and should—recognize the credits students have successfully completed in college acceleration programs in other states.

Additional Strategies to Improve College Acceleration Opportunities

While these interviews confirmed the importance of the nine non-negotiables to high-quality college acceleration opportunities for students, they also revealed additional strategies or, at the very least, some of the secret sauce these school leaders employ to make their college acceleration opportunities successful to the benefit of their students. These strategies are culture, risk-taking and leadership. These three elements permeate what the schools expect and do.

- **School Culture:** School leaders maintain an expectation that students will take college-level coursework, along with an unwavering conviction that students can succeed at rigorous, college-level work. Additionally, administrators, teachers and advisers continuously communicate college acceleration expectations to students and parents.
- **Risk Taking:** School leaders burst the status quo by deliberately pushing students to attempt more rigorous coursework, even if the action will result in pushback from students and parents. One school leader, for example, automatically enrolls students in college acceleration opportunities.

- **Leadership:** School leaders can turn culture, risk-taking and the non-negotiables into action by providing the school supports to help students succeed in college acceleration opportunities. Supports for student success don't end at the high school graduation stage but carry over into postsecondary and workforce life.

What's Next?

All of these schools are different. Each faces different challenges. Even so, these school leaders are united in facing those challenges. They share a common commitment to driving student success by providing high-quality college acceleration opportunities. But to succeed, they need state policymakers, colleges and universities, college acceleration providers, communities, parents and students to help. They can't do this alone.

Appreciations

ExcelinEd would like to thank the College Board for their assistance in supporting this playbook. We would also like to thank Cambridge, College Board and Ivy Tech Community College for help in identifying and selecting potential schools and school leaders to interview for the project. Additionally, ExcelinEd sends a deep thank you to the school leaders who were willing to participate in the project in the midst of preparing for COVID-19 and the safe reopening of their schools. These leaders are true professionals and are dedicated to the success of their schools and communities:

- **Dr. Narciso Garcia**, Superintendent of Vanguard Academy (Pharr, TX)
- **Melissa Patterson**, Principal of John I. Leonard High School (Greenacres, FL)
- **Brad Staley**, Principal of Richlands High School (Richlands, NC)
- **Chad Sutton**, Director of Career Development, Garrett High School (Garrett, IN)
- **Frances Turner**, Assistant Principal of Richlands High School (Richlands, NC)
- **Kimberly Waugh**, Director of K-14 Engagement and Transition, Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana
- **Jeremy Wright**, Principal of Plainwell High School (Plainwell, MI)



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